



Evaluation of the workshops

Quo vadis, V4: did COVID-19 make or break the V4+ format? was the main topic of all three workshop groups that was held on December 3rd as part of the Visegrad Youth Forum 2020. The participants discussed not only the current problems regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, but also whether the V4 should remain at the current level of cooperation, meaning the cooperation between the four countries, or can it and should it be transformed into a broader platform with more partner states from the European region.

The 1st workshop group discussed many different subjects from cooperation in the V4, nationalism, common interests or populism. In their opinion, the response of the Visegrad group was not well-adjusted as the format did not display its coherency and cooperation during the 1st wave of the pandemic. Nevertheless, it is still possible as the pandemic is not over yet. The participants of the 1st workshop agreed on the importance of showing that the cooperation still has its sense and meaning. Along with pandemic, the vaccines and possibility of creating some kind of together-working health system, joint purchase of medical equipment or vaccines can be considered as a good step. The next discussed topic among participants was the cooperation in the areas of science and innovation. This type of cooperation is not well known to the public and it should be more promoted. Regarding the misinformation and fake news which present threat to the society, participants tried to emphasize the importance of education, particularly education about history. Their opinion is that stronger education could prevent the growing spread of misinformation and polarisation of the society. The presentation of the cooperation could possibly be introduced by having common schoolbooks, materials (on EU or V4 group levels), or intensified Erasmus exchanges. The 1st workshop group believes that there is need for deeper cooperation as a group in different fields of interest as it presents the opportunity to find better and faster solutions to the current challenges. The cooperation of the V4 group should deepen as





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a good example to the EU to demonstrate the outstanding cooperation of leaders and countries within this larger association.

The 2nd workshop group came to the conclusion that Countries of the V4 group shall pursue, during the ongoing pandemic, any possible steps to return to a normal state and to deepen the cooperation of the group. Participants agreed on the misuse of the V4 group position from Hungary and Poland as Trojan horses of the European Union. The 2nd workshop group suggests the institutionalization of the V4 group. At the moment, they find the V4 group more as a discussion club rather than an influential platform of cooperation. The future of the V4 group is uncertain right now. In a positive case, countries of the format will strengthen the cooperation and communication about the pandemic. In a neutral case, the cooperation will remain at the same level. In a negative case, the states will individualize. Participants said that the development and cooperation of the group are slow and frozen. Medicine and approach to pandemic, vaccine The V4 group should follow the EU in the questions of health care and vaccination. Countries should perform better planning and logistics and when dealing with a pandemic and there should be a better redistribution of the means. They consider the V4 + format with Austria as a very tricky question and participants did not find a final agreement on the matter. There is a lack of communication channels, a lack of interest from all sides, a disagreement on nuclear weapons, and a very different view on history. On the other hand, due to the pandemic, the V4 lost the drive, and involving Austria could bring fresh air to the cooperation. V4+ format is a very good idea, but the common partner has not been decided yet. For Slovakia and the Czech Republic, Germany is a very strong partner. Another possibility is to involve some smaller and weaker partners like Ukraine and Slovenia.

Participants of the 3rd workshop group believe that the countries of the V4 group should diversify their agenda on the fields of culture, science, and security as the base for deeper cooperation. Security was the main field of interest in their





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discussion. We suggest the joined training of the army. This type of cooperation could be beneficial for all of the countries of the format. Army cooperation can be a starting point for the cooperation of the V4 with other states like the Baltic States or Russia and others. We are all in the EU and Schengen, the danger of Russia would concern all of us. This pandemic should enlarge and connect the healthcare of the V4 countries with security and fighting with disinformation. The V4 countries should cooperate and find a common policy to fight against the misinformation. Obviously, there is no certain way on how to do that, but individual states are stronger as a whole group.

The answer to the question: **“Did the COVID-19 make or break the V4+ format?”** as the main topic of the discussions among individual working groups was answered from more points of the view. For some of them, the pandemic frosted the process of cooperation among the V4 countries. Others think that the pandemic is not the result of a crisis within V4 states, but the rule of law and the EU budget. The participants suppose that with COVID-19 as an ongoing issue, we need more time to evaluate the situation and we need at least a few years to make a conclusion whether the pandemic broke the group or made it stronger. These topics must have a common voice among the V4 states. Although it is not very clear right now, the pandemic could damage the bonds between the V4 states which has been created long time ago. Another opinion was that the COVID-19 broke the V4 as an organization. The reason was that each country focused on themselves, how to cope with the pandemic, and save the economy system. Everybody has their own business and nobody cares for others. In somebody else’s point of view, there is no black and white answer to that question. There are opportunities and threats for the format. More time will have to pass to evaluate whether it made or broke the format. The situation, that the pandemic caused, somehow shows the weaknesses of our system, but it would be great to see people being responsible and take a lesson from current situation. More cooperation in different fields may prove beneficial in the future. In the times where everything is going perfectly fine, we do not learn as much as in these tough times and maybe this crisis will show some direction, which way the V4 should go in the near future.

